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THE
ANNUAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE PHILO AND FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETIES

OF

JEFFERSON COLLEGE,

CANONSBURG, PA.

ON THE DAY OF THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

September 27, 1838.

BY H. M. BRACKENRIDGE.

Washington:

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1838.

CORRESPONDENCE.

JEFFERSON COLLEGE, Sept. 27th 1838.

HON. H. M. BRACKENRIDGE :

Sir,

WE the committees of the Philo and Franklin Literary Societies, in their behalf, tender you their sincere thanks for your truly eloquent and appropriate address, delivered this day, before them and a highly gratified audience, and respectfully solicit a copy for publication.

With sentiments of unfeigned respect,

We remain Yours,

JAMES C. REID,
E. J. FORSYTH,
M. A. WILLIAMS. } *Com. Philo Lit. Soc.*

N. MILLER,
JNO. W. DUFF,
J. H. RITTENHOUSE. } *Com. Franklin Lit. Soc.*

JEFFERSON COLLEGE, Sept. 27th 1838.

Gentlemen,

I comply with pleasure with your request, made in very flattering terms, in behalf of the Philo and Franklin Literary Societies for a copy of the Address delivered by me to-day.

Accept, gentlemen, my best wishes for your individual happiness and that of your friends.

Yours respectfully,

H. M. BRACKENRIDGE.

Messrs. JAMES C. REID,
E. J. FORSYTH,
M. A. WILLIAMS, } *Com. of the Philo L. Society
of Jefferson College.*

Messrs. N. MILLER,
J. W. DUFF,
J. H. RITTENHOUSE. } *Com. of the Franklin L. Society
of Jefferson College.*

ANNUAL ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE LITERARY SOCIETIES :

THE FUTURE may be compared to a vast field without definite boundaries—to an immense ocean, or rather to an undiscovered country within it, which every one fashions and peoples according to his fancy. It is the prospect of that undiscovered region, which governs all our thoughts and actions, directs our journey through life, and opens the door to eternity. The busy bee and diligent ant, unconsciously follow their instinct, just as the flower which in obedience to the laws of nature, opens its bosom to the rising sun, and to the dews of evening. But in man, the future is a high and ethereal sentiment, inherent in a being endowed with godlike faculties of mind, capable of comparing the past with the present, and prompting to draw aside the mysterious curtain which hides from his view, the course of events only known to omniscience.

In our youthful and fervid imagination, before experience has corrected the pleasing error, the future of this life is adorned with every charm, and this fair world, so beautiful even amid the deformity of sin, is viewed as though it were a Paradise.—How full of various, delightful, and novel incident seems the devious course of time, while yet ascending the hill of life! But the summit once gained, and a glance thrown back, the road seems to dwindle to a span, and the fields which border it, are stripped as by the wintry blast of all their verdure, bloom and beauty. Yet onward the way still leads, the future still cheers us, and one hour of the life before us, is worth, in our estimation, ages of recorded time.

When the wise man declared, that all was “vanity and vexation of spirit,” he had in view the present and the past, for the future with its still untried scenes was before him; and if his earthly pilgrimage was about to close, it was but to begin a new

life to last for ever. For you, the future even of this life remains to be travelled over, as the generations which will come after you, must travel it. As you now tread on the heels of those before you, others will tread on your heels :

“*Jam cras hesternum consumpsimus, ecce aliud cras.*”

Yes, the morrow of yesterday is gone, but another comes—and we need not fear its coming, if we so regulate our thoughts and actions, as to be able to look back without the “compunctious visitings of conscience.” Let it be our aim, if possible, to make the past the safe model of the future.

That future is indeed covered over with thick clouds and darkness. According to the beautiful allegory of the “bridge of Mirza,” at either end there is an impenetrable mist which conceals, while we stand in the centre, both our entrance and our exit. The part which lies before us is but dimly lighted. By the lurid lamp of Philosophy, judging of the future by the past, we have an indistinct view of coming events; but it is only to his chosen prophets, that it has pleased the Almighty to impart some of the secrets of futurity. Those have been shown to the rest of men as “in a glass dimly,” until made clearly manifest by fulfilment; and even then, have usually related to the mighty revolutions of states and empires, while the fate which hangs over the short space of human life, is concealed by divine goodness.

The life of man, considered as an individual, is the present moment—but how fleeting!—It is compared to the current of the running stream, ever coming, and ever passing on. But as an order of created beings, like the river itself, it is little else than immortality on earth. During that passing moment of individual existence, man is apt to deceive himself with the belief that he is the whole, instead of being but a particle, and arrogating to himself divine attributes, exclaims with the Assyrian Monarch, “is not this Great Babylon, which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” Vain and presumptuous, as such expressions must appear, they are peculiar to our race, and although unwise and misdirected, prove that we have within us a spark of that godlike fire, which aspires to immortality and omnipotence. But the moralist justly tells us, that

vainglory and inordinate ambition are not the proper companions of the future of this short and uncertain life, and that they too often bring with them shame, disappointment and remorse. Can history afford higher examples of great achievement, than those of an Alexander or a Napoleon; and can we say of their mighty labours, *finis coronat opus*? No—we turn away with feelings of pity when we contemplate the wretched end of all their greatness. I mean the end, so far as relates to the grave objects which they are supposed to have had in view, although the remote effects of their conquests may have been such as to change the face of the world. Far be it from me to condemn the high reachings prompted by the love of fame, the desire to excel, to do great things worthy to be recorded, and to live for ever on the annals of our race. Such incentives again betray the divine spark of our origin, and where properly directed, and properly restrained, and tempered by wisdom, cannot be displeasing in the sight of the Almighty. We cannot all be Alexanders, Napoleons, or Washingtons; although moving in a narrower sphere, there is ample room for comparative aggrandizement, for almost every thing around us must be estimated by comparison; you especially, whose glass has yet expended but a small portion of its sands, may attain the highest elevation of prosperity and distinction your country may present. And here without desiring to repress a generous and well directed ardor, permit me to temper your too sanguine hopes and expectations, by the poetic, yet somewhat melancholy words of Ossian—"son of the winged winds, why dost thou build the airy hall! The blast of the desert comes—it howls through thy empty courts."

But even the vices of ambition may be praiseworthy, compared to the selfish idleness and inanity which mark the useless in human Society. Have we been created in vain, or only placed on the stage of life to be idle spectators? No—this would ill comport with the wisdom of the creator. Our several parts have been assigned to us, and it should be our desire to act them well, that we may find favor both in the sight of God and man. Let no one imagine that he faithfully executes his trust by hiding in a hedge the talent confided to him; it will not be the talent alone that he will be called to render an account of, but the use

he may have made of it. Let him not think that he will be held guiltless, whose narrow, contracted soul will not allow him to plant without a certainty of fruition, or whose sordid heart shrinks at the possibility that another may enjoy the fruits of his labour.— I once heard a sentiment from the lips of an aged and unlettered farmer, which for its nobleness and beauty I thought it meet to use the language of Shakespeare, “that it should be written down in the tablets of my memory.” He was engaged in planting out young fruit trees, when some one observed to him; “you are giving yourself very unnecessary trouble, you cannot live to eat the fruit of those trees, and after your death your orchard may be sold and go into the hands of strangers.” “That is true,” replied the old man, “but some one will eat of the fruit of these trees, *and perhaps may bless the man who planted them.*” Such sentiments tend to awaken the noblest motives to human actions; they give rise to a pure and disinterested benevolence, which more than any other characteristic, serves to elevate the race of man to its highest dignity, placing it only a little below the angels. In the language of the poet,

“Hoc est
Vivere bis, vita posse priori frui”—

No virtuous action is entirely lost; its reward will come in some way or other, and often when least expected. But the remembrance of pure and disinterested deeds, and of a useful life, serves to heighten our present enjoyments, and will certainly attend the future as its greatest wealth and highest ornament; while those who are content with being mere consumers of the fruits of the earth, *fruges consumere nati*, are distinguished only by the human form, from the brutes that perish, but which unconsciously fulfil the purposes of their creation.

That future, so full of hopes, and fears, and doubts, so full of good and ill, now lies before you, perhaps at this particular moment, with an oppressive sense of its importance. Those of you who are about to bid adieu to this Alma Mater, this nurse of your youthful minds, already look upon the wide and boundless prospect overhung by shadows, clouds and darkness. Yet, you are not in the situation of our first parents, in quitting the blissful

bowers of Eden for their sins, in thirsting after forbidden knowledge. As in their case, however,

“The world is all before you, where to choose
Your place of *rest*, with Providence your guide,”—

But your *rest*, must be toil and labour, and incessant application while health and ability remain; and that labour will also constitute your highest happiness. As the future men of your country, you will be called upon in your several ways, to engage in active pursuits, and which will not cease entirely until you shall reach that place of rest where the cares and anxieties of life shall trouble you no more.

In all your future wanderings, and amid all your future cares, a sense of gratitude will teach you to remember the fostering hand of that nurse of intellect to whom you are indebted for the broad and solid foundations of literature and science, upon which you must raise your own superstructures. Perhaps some future day, you may be called upon to discharge a duty similar to that required of him who now addresses you—would that his abilities were equal to the task! He has ever cherished with feelings of gratitude the memory of the venerable Dunlap, who presided over this institution, when he repaired hither to drink at its fountains of knowledge. He cannot forget Professor Miller, who was beloved by his pupils as a father, a self-taught prodigy in the exact sciences, with the simple manners of a child, while his happy mode of imparting the most abstruse ideas rendered his instruction invaluable. He retains the most vivid remembrance of professor Wilson, an extraordinary man, possessed of that universal mind, which “wings its eagle flight against the blaze of every science, with an eye that never winks and a wing that never tires.” Alas, how awful is the contemplation of that future so full of good, so abundant in blessings, and yet so full of woe to man! But let us bear in mind that we are ever in the hands of Providence; let us endeavour to do our duty to the best of our abilities, and leave the rest to infinite wisdom. Most truly is it said, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet riches to men of understanding.”

But whether about to take your leave of this institution, or to remain sometime longer under its fostering wings, and whatever

may be your future pursuits, and that they may be happy is the sincere wish of my heart, permit me to recall to your recollection the beautiful allegory of Prodicus, called, "the choice of Hercules," who preferred the labours of wisdom to the temptations of pleasure and folly. And there is one moral maxim I would earnestly inculcate, as the foundation, as the soul of all morality. Let truth, truth, be your polar star in all your thoughts, words, and actions. A man without truth, says Demosthenes, *is like a pipe without a tongue*. You may guard against a thief or a bandit, but there is no safety from one who is regardless of truth. The whole moral education of the great Cyrus, according to Xenophon, might be summed up in the idea, that he was taught to speak the truth! One of the greatest geniuses of the past age, the atheist Voltaire, in his epic poem, paid homage to truth as the only deity he was willing to own. His singular invocation, like the altar of the Athenians, "to the unknown God," was an unconscious acknowledgement of the being he denied.

"Descend du haut des cieux auguste verite,
Repand sur mes ecrits, ta force et ta clarte."—

"All powerful truth, descend from heaven, and spread o'er my page thy light and power." And where else could he look for the fountain of truth but in that Being in whom dwells all excellence as well as all power and glory!

Some of you, from sincere conviction, uninfluenced by worldly considerations, may have resolved in your hearts to go forth, as the messengers of peace and good will to man, in imitation of the great author of your religious faith. Self humbled, and mortified, attended by charity, and banishing far from you the pride of sanctity, you will endeavor to subdue the passions of men, instead of adding fuel to their rage. It must be confessed that there are those who have taken up the cross in a different spirit—that have been lifted up by the dignity of their office, and believing themselves divine ambassadors, clothed with a portion of that power in which their master will appear to judge the earth, have forgotten that they are only the followers of the meek and humble sufferer, who laid no claim to temporal authority. Leaving the sword, or the power and authority of states, to other hands, you will appeal only to the heart and draw it after you

by the cords of love. And yet the evangelical teacher, notwithstanding his spiritual calling, may often mingle in temporal concerns, in such a measure as to exalt his own character, and at the same time more affectually accomplish the end of his mission. A virtuous and useful life below, may be the best preparative to the life to come. We have in that wise and good man Oberlin, a model almost perfect, of a clergyman, devoting himself to the improvement of the temporal, as well as the spiritual condition of his flock. As his poor and wretched parishioners became better sheltered, fed and clothed; as roads and communications with other neighborhoods were opened through his means, they grew less barbarous; they erected churches and schoolhouses, and became exemplary in their morals and habits of industry.—Every step taken by these people in the improvement of their temporal condition, produced a corresponding advancement in their spiritual elevation, until they were regarded throughout the enlightened portion of Europe, as the model of moral, social order, as well as of religious purity. This was not, however, the work of a day. It was accomplished by the slow progress of line upon line, and precept upon precept, during the unremitted labors of sixty years. It was not accomplished by an occasional inflammatory address, which like the fire in stubble blazes for a moment and is consumed, or like the seed thrown on the ground without after culture, or like water spilt upon the sand which drinks it up without imparting nourishment to a single plant.—No, Oberlin accomplished his work by perseverance, by continued, unremitted exertion, both of body and mind; he accomplished it by living among his people, by sharing in their labors and in their sufferings, by acts of active benevolence and charity, by all those persecuting parental cares and attentions, which in the end cannot fail to subdue the most stubborn and ferocious hearts.

Your future pursuits must, however, vary according to your several inclinations or circumstances, or fitness, real or supposed. The learned professions of law and medicine, with many of you, are the ultimate objects of your preparatory studies. These studies will never come amiss whatever may be your future career of usefulness, whether in the learned professions, in the busy pursuits of trade and commerce, or in the quiet and peace-

ful, but not idle scenes of rural life. If a love of letters has been kindled in your breasts, it will be the purest source of worldly happiness. Science and literature for their own sakes are inestimable. Compared with them what are mere sensual gratifications, the sordid pursuit of wealth or the vain aspirings of ambition? These are comparatively unsatisfactory, disappoint expectation, and often produce the bitter fruits of repentance. The cup of enjoyment sweetened for the palate, and crowned with flowers, when drained may be found to contain a poisonous asp at the bottom! On the other hand, literature leaves no sting behind it, cloy no sense, produces no surfeit, nor does it weary and disgust by use and excess. How beautifully is this expressed by Cicero in his defence of his friend, the poet Archias. *Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant; adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent; delectant domi, non impediunt foris; pernoctant nobiscum, perigrinantur, rusticantur.* These studies form the mind of youth and are the delight of old age; they adorn prosperity and afford a solace and refuge in misfortune; they yield us pleasure at home, and do not incommode us while abroad; they abide with us at night, accompany us in our travels, and become our companions in solitude.

For the sake of our country, blessed with wise political institutions, we stand in need of all the light that can be shed over it by education. Your relative duties to this Republic, of which you are favored citizens, are of the highest importance. You whom I address, are the future freemen, or rather the sovereigns of your country; and knowledge will be as necessary to enable you to perform those high duties, as it is to the monarch on the throne. The education of American youth ought to be such as is befitting princes who may be called to the inheritance of sovereign power. Some of you will be among our future statesmen; and it is certain that all will not only be called upon to judge the actions and determine the pretensions of others, but also to aid the judgment of your fellow citizens, whose means and opportunities of information may not be equal to your own. What should we think of the sovereign of some enlightened nation, who should be unable to comprehend the budget submitted

to him by his ministers, or who might be entirely incompetent to form his Cabinet? Every American citizen will be called upon to judge of the conduct and fitness of those who are entrusted by his vote, with the management of the affairs of State. It is his duty to decide upon a thousand questions of policy and law, of expediency, of finance, of foreign relations, and of just or unjust impeachment of the conduct of the public agents. In the little democracy of Athens, all the citizens could be assembled in one place and every requisite information communicated orally. Affairs of state could be discussed in their hearing, while the leading statesmen and orators were personally known to every one. It is very different in this widely spread representative democracy. The press must here be the principal instrument of communication between the people and those entrusted with authority. The interests of the state, either singly or as connected with a great confederacy of states, are infinitely more various and complex. The eminent men to whom we must confide the machinery of government, are for the greater part, too far removed from us to be personally known. These are among the great difficulties which our wonderful popular institutions are yet destined to encounter. If it be said, that it is impossible for a very large proportion of the citizens to become personally acquainted, or to obtain exact information by reading on those subjects on which their judgments must be exercised, then the greater need for knowledge, and the virtuous use of it in that smaller and more gifted number, who are to be the future lights of the land. In theory at least, our government is founded on the virtue and intelligence of the people, and in practice it ought to be made to approach as near the theory as possible. Then, my friends, as to the future lights and guides of your countrymen, a holy trust is confided to you—it is no less than its sacred liberties, the purity of the administration of government upon which its future character, its duration, its happiness or misery will depend.

And who can at this moment form a just conception of the future magnitude of that trust, when he reflects upon the vast development of greatness, for which this country is destined? We behold a seat of empire occupying an immense space, pos-

possessing the most fertile soils, the finest climates, the richest and most varied products, watered by the noblest rivers; and we cannot refrain from exclaiming with admiration, what a field for the improvement of human society upon the largest, the most liberal and enlightened scale! According to the ordinary course of events, *deo volente*, in less than twenty years, its population will double, that is, there will be added to it, another American nation, equal in numbers to that which now derives its nourishment from its teeming bosom. You may live to see another geometrical reduplication, and what obscure spots, at this day unnoted and unknown, will be towns and cities, what villages will become great seats of trade and manufactures, what mountains will be cut down, what canals and rail-ways will be made, annihilating space and lengthening time that may be usefully employed! These are subjects on which the imagination may expatiate without limit and perhaps at the expense of being taxed with presumptuous vanity and pride. Yet, connecting these probable developments with the progress of science, and new discoveries, it is difficult to refrain from gazing at the glorious vision of the future, without an expanding horizon which embraces our whole race. In fancy we behold the revolutions of mind overcoming the barriers of ignorance and superstition, which stand in the way of the improvement and population of vast regions on this favored continent stretching from the Equator to Cape Horn. With a vision still enlarging, we cast our eyes across the Atlantic, and behold benighted Africa, awakening from her deep slumbers, and from a small germ of population like that of the Pilgrims of Plymouth, we see light and civilization, and true religion shedding their effulgence over that unhappy land. Looking towards the East, we see the Indian and the Chinese, casting aside their false gods and their traditional prejudices and habits, which more nearly resemble the instinct of mere animals, than the self-imposed laws of reasoning creatures.

Why should philanthropists whose wishes are the same for the amelioration of the human race, be illiberal towards each other; in respect of the means of accomplishing these great ends? It would be a presumptuous thought to limit the interposition of

the Deity to those means, which to our finite reason may seem the best. His ways and his means are as inscrutable as they are various. Sometimes the command is given immediately to man by the voice of inspiration; sometimes the supreme fiat is executed by the sword of justice, and sometimes it is even brought about by the hand of the spoiler. Joshua was commanded to break down the idolatry of the Canaanites and deliver up the land of Palestine to the chosen people; the wicked Assyrian kings were raised up to punish that people when they had forsaken the true God; and in turn that Great Babylon was delivered up to the Medes and Persians. In the mighty events recorded both by profane and sacred history, we clearly trace an overruling providence. The Grecian phalanx was permitted to break down the power of the East, and in its turn was broken by the Roman legion. After this the Northern hive sent forth its swarms to overrun the Earth, and this great and last act of the drama is still advancing to its accomplishment. But we must not suffer our imaginations to soar with too high a wing; we must never forget that the future is in the hands of an Almighty power, compared to whose vast designs the highest wisdom of man is folly. And here we may appropriately apply the words of the inspired Psalmist, which, while they restrain the aspiring vanity of the finite creature, assign to man his high rank among created things.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained;”

“What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him?”

“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.”



